the Texas Deck, the more familiar term for the forward end of the Texas Cabin is the "Captain's Quarters." This cabin was one of the staterooms originally built for officers on the boat; additional staterooms for crew were added on both the Texas and Main Decks once she finished her work as a ferry and short trade packet and became an excursion vessel.

The uncovered seating area around the Texas Deck is called the "Hurricane Deck" as it is completely exposed to any and all weather conditions.

Extensive renovation was done in 1990 to the Captain's Quarters, bringing it to more closely resemble its original design and to make it more comfortable for entertaining small groups. As walls were removed, crew members working on the project were fascinated by the evidences of history that were uncovered during the restoration.

And On The Very Top

The "Pilot House" is the only structure on the top of the boat – sitting directly over the Texas Cabin – and it is perhaps the most wondrous "room" on the entire vessel. All decisions concerning the navigation of the Belle are made here, yet it contains no radar, sonar, or other sophisticated electronic equipment. The pilots (steersmen) and captains operate the boat now in ways similar to her operation in her early years.

Steering is done by the use of the "Belle's" original pilot wheel – 7' in diameter and assisted by a steam-driven "power steering" system. To make the boat easier to steer, she was provided with three rudders (tillers) that work in tandem. Steering levers (patented in 1898) located in the Pilot House are attached to a steam cylinder in the Engine Room. The cylinder is connected to the tiller bars; and when the levers are moved one direction or the other, a valve in the cylinder is opened and pressurized steam pushes against the cylinder, thereby forcing the rudders to move the direction requested by the pilot.

In the early days of the "Belle's" operation, orders were sent to the Engine Room through the "western river bell system" that used a series of bells (jingles) and gongs to signal the engineers regarding the direction and speed needed by the pilot or captain. Though the "bell" system is still intact on the boat, in 1953, a new, more efficient "engine room telegraph system" – consisting of a circle resembling a clock face and an indicator – was installed. As the pilot moves the indicator in the Pilot House, a corresponding indicator moves around a corresponding circle in the Engine Room, thereby alerting the engineer to the direction and speed desired. The engineer then makes the proper adjustments by hand to the engines themselves to match the pilot's orders.

Departing and landing are particularly difficult on a vessel of the "Belle's" size, and they are operations that cannot be done by the pilot alone. Because the pilot's vision of the wharf or ground is obstructed by the width and length of the boat, the captain stands on one of the "wing bridges" that extend beyond the front of the Texas Roof and, by use of an intercom (a megaphone in an earlier day) gives signals and orders to both the pilot and the first mate to coordinate the efforts of the person at the wheel and the deck crew handling the lines.

An interesting feature of the boat found on the roof is two " 'scape pipes" located on either side of the calliope. They resemble small smokestacks and provide for the escape of exhaust steam from the engines. These somewhat rare pipes are found on only two steamboats today, and they add a special touch to the "Belle of Louisville."

It's Not Whistling "Dixie", But...

The "Belle's" whistle is operated from the Pilot House as pressure is exerted on a foot pedal near the pilot wheel. Pressing on the pedal opens a valve located on top of the boilers that forces steam into the whistle chamber. The result is a musical "chord"; and because of